CITY OF VANCOUVER
100
PLANNING DEPARTMENT

DOWNTOWN VANCOUVER
PLANNING STRATEGIES FOR A CHANGING WORLD

PROCEEDINGS - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

of the March 23, 1988

SYMPOSIUM ON DOWNTOWN VANCOUVER

Co-sponsors:

Vancouver City Planning Commission (VCPC)

City of Vancouver Planning Department

DOWNTOWN VANCOUVER:
PLANNING STRATEGIES FOR A CHANGING WORLD

A SYMPOSIUM ON THE INNER CITY
CO-SPONSORED BY THE
VANCOUVER CITY PLANNING COMMISSION (VCPC)
AND THE
VANCOUVER PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Date:	Wednesday, March 23, 1988
Time:	8:30 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.
Place:	Vancouver Vocational Institute 250 West Pender

AGENDA

8:30 A.M.	Registration
9:00 A.M.	Opening Remarks by Chairman, Mayor Gordon Campbell
9:20 A.M..	Presentation by Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Ferris, Chairman, VCPC and Mr. Ray Spaxman, Director of Planning
10:00 A.M.	Workshop Discussions
12:00 NOON	Lunch at J.J.'s Lounge, the dining room of VVI
12:45 P.M.	Keynote Speaker, Dr. David Ley, Professor and Acting Head, Geography Dept., UBC
1:15 P.M.	Plenary Session
2:30 P.M.	Sum Up by Mr. Larry Beasley, Associate Director of Planning, Central Area
2:45 P.M.	Closing Remarks by Chairman, Mayor Gordon Campbell
3:00 P.M.	Adjournment

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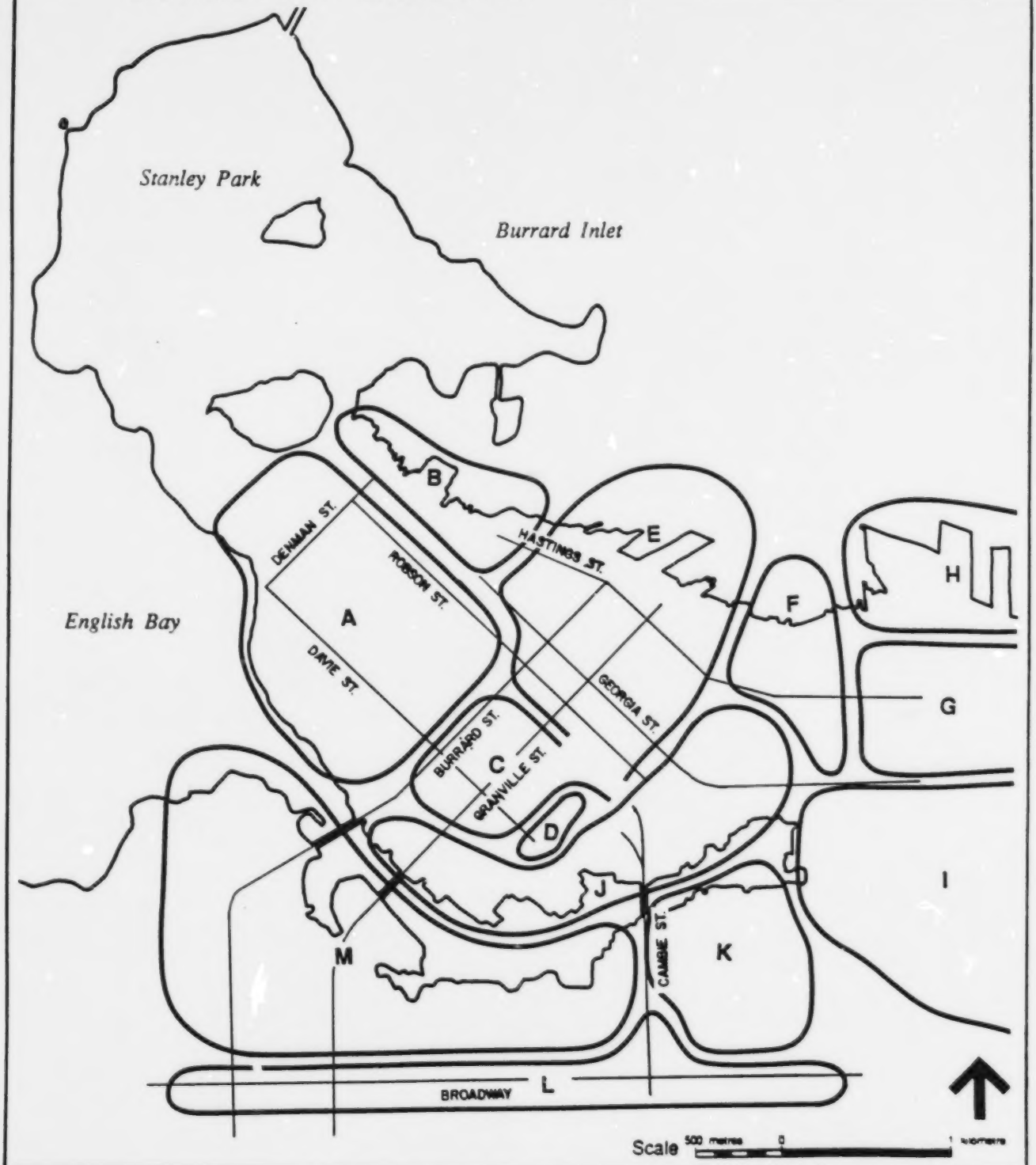
DOWNTOWN VANCOUVER



AREA A: West End
AREA B: Burrard Inlet
AREA C: Downtown South
AREA D: Yaletown
AREA E: Central Business District
AREA F: Gastown/Chinatown
AREA G: Downtown East
AREA H: Port
AREA I: BNR Lands
AREA J: False Creek North
AREA K: False Creek S.E.
AREA L: Broadway
AREA M: False Creek South

Downtown Vancouver Symposium, March 1988
City of Vancouver Planning Department

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SYMPOSIUM PARTICIPANTS

- Over 130 people gathered at Vancouver Vocational Institute on March 23, 1988 for the one-day Symposium, **Downtown Vancouver: Planning Strategies for a Changing World.** Chaired by the Mayor and co-sponsored by the Vancouver City Planning Commission and the City of Vancouver Planning Department, the Symposium's invited guests represented major downtown business, neighbourhood, and arts, education, and social service groups, as well as agencies from all levels of government.

SYMPOSIUM PURPOSE

- The Symposium was part of a process to provide public input into two separate but overlapping tasks. The City Council-appointed Planning Commission is preparing a general Futures report to follow up on its Goals for Vancouver program. The Planning Department is reviewing the downtown plans of the mid-1970s to prepare an up-dated context and policies for the central area.

- Symposium participants were asked two main questions: "What kind of downtown do you want?" and "What challenges and opportunties must we address to achieve your idea of a quality downtown?"

FORMAT OF THE PROCEEDINGS

- The Symposium yielded much information. To reflect the depth and breadth of the dialogue and yet to make the results of the Symposium easily accessible is the two-fold goal of the Proceedings. Accordingly, while the organization of the main report follows the agenda of the day, it is also designed to be read in all or in part and in varying sequence, depending upon the interest of the reader. A quick overview is provided in this Executive Summary.

WORKSHOP HIGHLIGHTS

- The morning workshops in which everyone participated were the heart of the day's events. Participants were divided into eight workshops based on organizational affiliations: three business and development workshops, community services general and housing, residents and neighbourhoods, environment, and culture and entertainment. Each had the same mandate to discuss all aspects of the downtown.

- The major themes of the workshop discussions are summarized below in several topics.

Commercial

- Symposium participants in several workshops put forward many ideas for economic development: the continuation and expansion of port functions, the maturing of the international city, the possibility of new high tech industry, and the expansion of tourism. There was frequent discussion of the need for an understanding of the economic base, in order to foster economic development.

- Retail, a popular topic of discussion in all workshops, was connected to the desire for a pedestrian downtown and livable neighbourhoods. Participants expressed concern that continued development of underground and mall-type retail would take people and activity off the streets.

Housing

- There were several major themes in the Symposium discussion of housing, eliciting both the most and least agreement of any Symposium discussions.

- More downtown area housing was one of the Symposium's most consistently expressed goals.

- Housing mix was also an explicit part of the vision for the future in nearly all workshops. But how much of a mix and to what extent market-led and/or guided by public policy was a real difference of opinion not only between workshops but sometimes within them.

- The three neighbourhood and social services workshops stressed the need to protect existing neighbourhoods and affordable housing stock. The participants also described the components necessary to create livable new neighbourhoods: services and amenities must be in place before housing, especially for less mobile groups.

- Many participants were in favour of higher density housing, but in a cross-section of workshops there were also concerns that higher densities could mean less livability.

Transportation

- The most specific of all ideas put forward at the Symposium was the widespread call for better public transit within the downtown area: lower cost and better linkage among areas.

- The importance of regional access to downtown was generally noted, although without discussion of specific proposals.

- The need for more downtown parking and bike routes were the other two major transportation themes.

Environment

- The environmental quality and the ambiance of the downtown were the most frequently discussed components of the vision for the future. "Alive after five", a "24 hour downtown", pedestrian activity, and waterfront access described participants' desired future.

- Participants called specifically for improvements to the public realm: streets, sidewalks, open spaces, and parks throughout the various downtown areas.

- "Mixed uses" and "character areas" were important elements in the discussions. While all areas would have retail, parks, and recreation, the major residential, office, and industrial areas would be distinct from each other. Identifiable precincts were seen as strong elements in Vancouver's downtown from a variety of points of view, including tourist attraction and neighbourhood stability.

- A final and less expected concern was that the downtown needs to be enhanced "for all people".

Cultural - Entertainment

- Cultural, entertainment, and educational activities were seen as essential to the mix of uses that provide an active downtown.

Social Services

- This was the theme of the largest workshop, Community Services, whose participants represented the many at-risk and special needs groups traditionally concentrated in the core of the city.

- Participants were concerned about the need for much better neighbourhood support services for special needs groups -- especially for the newly deinstitutionalized persons being released into downtown areas.

- Another concern was inadequate funding. Participants noted that society either "pays now or pays later".

- Participants in this workshop wished they had been mixed with the variety of other interest groups at the Symposium, to communicate clearly the concerns of the groups they represent.

Process

- It is only through continued communication among the wide variety of individuals and groups affected by downtown change that all can more clearly understand its impacts, both positive and negative. For many workshops, the importance of community involvement in the planning process was a major theme.

Other

- Three other themes arose throughout workshop discussions: acknowledging the market, accepting growth, and building on strengths.

- The importance of knowing where markets work, where they do not, how to enhance their functioning, and when to intervene or not was a common thread throughout many discussions.

- Growth was generally seen as bringing many opportunities to the downtown. Growth was not feared for its own sake, provided that its impacts, especially on existing communities, could be controlled.

- Participants spoke often of building on the downtown's present strengths: housing, character areas, environmental quality, safety and cleanliness, waterfront location, and the absence of expressways. "How do we preserve, from a planning point of view, our uniqueness?"

KEYNOTE SPEECH HIGHLIGHTS

- In the after-lunch keynote speech, Dr. David Ley said that urban plans do make a difference. Choices do exist. But we must not underestimate the challenge of managing change.

- Because we are in a city with plural needs and multiple objectives, Dr. Ley's vision for the future of downtown Vancouver had three dimensions: economic development, social equity, and environmental livability.

- Downtown Vancouver's two major comparative advantages for successful economic development are the prestige office sector and the tourism, cultural, and leisure activities sectors.

- Regarding equity, Dr. Ley said that the inner city has historically provided the single largest stock of affordable housing, but that this has been substantially eroded. A policy response to this problem, he said, remains an urgent priority.

- In terms of livability, Dr. Ley pointed to many significant achievements in the past fifteen years including waterfront access and enhanced aesthetics. But he expressed a caution that livability must be a primary consideration in any high density housing.

- In closing, Dr. Ley described the roles of the private and public sector within the context of his three-fold vision. The private sector is the "dynamo of economic development". The public sector is the "overall manager and arbiter", the protector and promoter of livability and equity, as well as a generator of economic development. Unusual opportunities to reconcile conflicting objectives exist where land is already publicly owned.

- As a final point, Dr. Ley said that the options are greatest on the large undeveloped and underdeveloped sites such as on the north shore of False Creek and Burrard Inlet.

CONCLUSION

- Taken together, Pacific Place, Coal Harbour, the Downtown South, the West End, East False Creek, and Southeast False Creek equal close to 1,000 downtown acres undergoing rezoning or review. The Symposium was an opportunity to look beyond each of these individual areas to the central area as a whole. The current tasks of the Planning Commission and of the Planning Department are to continue these efforts to provide larger contexts for the changing parts.